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American Citizen Services Newsletter December 2009

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SAFETY AND SECURITY SITUATION

We reiterate the State Department’s Country Specific Information on Macedonia: The security situation in Macedonia is stable, although occasional criminal violence does occur. Americans should avoid areas with demonstrations, strikes, or roadblocks where large crowds are gathered, particularly those involving political causes or striking workers. Crime in Macedonia is low by U.S. standards, and violent crime against Americans is rare. Pick-pocketing, theft, and other petty street crimes do occur, however, particularly in areas where tourists and foreigners congregate. American travelers are advised to take the same precautions against becoming crime victims as they would in any U.S. city. Valuables, including cell phones and electronic items, should not be left in plain view in unattended vehicles. Windows and doors should be securely locked when residences are not occupied. Organized crime is present in Macedonia; organized criminal activity occasionally results in violent confrontations between members of rival organizations. ATM use is generally safe; however, travelers should take standard safety precautions.

The loss or theft abroad of a U.S. passport should be reported immediately to the local police and the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. If you are a victim of a crime while overseas, in addition to reporting to the local police, please contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate for assistance. The Embassy/Consulate staff can, for example, assist you to find appropriate medical care, to contact family members or friends, and explain how funds could be transferred. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and find an attorney if needed.

The Worldwide Caution issued for American citizens abroad by the U.S. Department of State regarding the threat of terrorist acts has been updated as of July 29, 2009. For the latest security information, Americans traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's website at <http://travel.state.gov>, where up-to-date [Worldwide Caution Public Announcements](#), [Travel Warnings and Public Announcements](#) can be found.

UPCOMING HOLIDAYS

The Embassy will be closed for the following holidays:

- Christmas Day – Friday, December 25
- New Year's Day – Friday, January 1
- Orthodox Christmas – Thursday, January 7
- Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. – Monday, January 18
- Washington's Birthday – Monday, February 15

HOLIDAY SECURITY AWARENESS

The U.S. Embassy in Skopje takes this opportunity to remind everyone to increase their general level of security awareness and take appropriate precautions during the upcoming holiday season. Typically, the holiday season brings a general increase in criminal activity. Below is specific information and guidance on how to keep you and your family safe throughout the holidays.

Residences are more likely to be targets of thefts during this time of year. Keep your perimeter gates, doors, and windows securely locked when no one is at home.

Guard against pick pocketing and other crimes of opportunity, particularly since criminals may become more aggressive in their tactics during this period. Vehicles also represent an excellent target for criminals - not just the vehicle itself, but the items inside. Place all valuables out of sight. This includes bags, briefcases, and other containers that a criminal might imagine could hide something of value.

Never drink and drive! Take a taxi or call a friend for a ride if drinking. Not only do you risk your life and the lives of others, you also are risking your freedom, job, and reputation when you drive under the influence. Even if you do not drink and drive, keep in mind that other drivers on the road may be intoxicated. In conjunction with dim street lighting, poor road conditions, general reckless driving the roadways can be a hazardous place for both drivers and pedestrians.

Over the next few weeks, there will be a number of large public events and celebrations throughout Macedonia, including the New Year's celebrations in the city center. These events attract crowds in the thousands, including criminals looking for vulnerable targets. Many individuals participating in New Year's celebrations will be using alcohol and may display or discharge firearms (what goes up – must come down). Your personal security awareness should address these important issues as well.

BE PREPARED FOR THE H1N1 INFLUENZA

With the potential threat of the spread of H1N1 this winter, everyone is encouraged to review their preparedness planning. As the winter flu season approaches, it is critical that everyone reinvigorate their efforts in order to mitigate the effects of this virus on our communities both at home and abroad.

Taking precautions for this flu season is a responsibility we all share. Visit <http://flu.gov> to make sure you are ready, learn how you can help promote public awareness, and learn what steps you can take to prepare and do your part to mitigate the effects of H1N1.

For the latest information on H1N1 Influenza, please remember to regularly check the Department of State's official webpage on H1N1:

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/pa/pa_4493.html

The official website of the Macedonian Ministry of Health <http://moh.gov.mk/> includes some information in English on H1N1 influenza.

EXPLORE TRAVEL HEALTH WITH THE NEW 2010 YELLOW BOOK

International travel is becoming more and more commonplace, and thus having at least a basic understanding of the medical problems that travelers face has become a necessary aspect of practicing medicine. The *Center for Disease Control Health Information for International Travel 2010* has been extensively revised for this latest edition in an effort to stay on the cutting edge of travel health information. The book is meant to be a guide to the practice of travel medicine, as well as the authoritative source of U.S. government recommendations for immunizations and prophylaxis for foreign travel. The goal of this book is to be a comprehensive resource for the practitioner and public to find the answers to their travel-related questions, whether before travel, during travel, or post-travel. For this information and more, go to <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/content/yellowbook/home-2010.aspx> .

TIPS FOR A SMOOTH CONSULAR VISIT

- Please make sure you have read on our website our hours of operation and have taken note of Macedonian and American holidays before planning your visit.
- **For passport applicants:** Complete (but do not sign) passport applications ahead of time – this considerably shortens your visit.
- **Photos:** Pay special attention to passport photograph requirements and make sure you obtain 2” by 2” photos.
- **For minors (passport applicants below age 16):** Parents, please remember to bring your child's original birth certificate and social security number when applying for a new or replacement passport.
- **For notary clients:** Please ensure you have read your document(s) to be notarized and understand the contents. Do not sign your document, but make sure that all other blanks are filled in before coming to the Embassy.
- **Please remember:** The fewer items you bring to the Embassy (i.e. backpacks, laptops, cell phones, etc.), the more quickly the security check will be for everyone.

ONLINE PASSPORT FORM WIZARD MAKES APPLICATIONS A BREEZE!

The U.S. Department of State has prepared an online wizard allowing you to fill in the data fields of a passport application and prepare a hardcopy, all in a few simple steps. After filling out your application on-line, print and bring your application with you to your appointment. You can access the required forms using the Passport Wizard at the following site:
<https://pptform.state.gov/?Submit=COMPLETE+FORM+DS-4085+ONLINE>.

The American Citizen Services Unit of the U.S. Embassy in Skopje encourages all citizens needing passport services to use the electronic application form as it will significantly decrease the time needed to process your application and increase the accuracy of the data entered for you.

WHO MUST REGISTER FOR SELECTIVE SERVICE?

Almost all male U.S. citizens, and male aliens who are 18 through 25, are required to register with Selective Service. It's important to know that even though he is registered, a man will not automatically be inducted into the military. In a crisis requiring a draft, men would be called in sequence determined by random lottery number and year of birth. Then, they would be examined for mental, physical and moral fitness by the military before being deferred or exempted from military service or inducted into the Armed Forces. For more information, please visit the Selective Service web site at: <http://www.sss.gov>.

“SUMNAL” IS LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS

Do you feel like helping the little Roma children wandering around the streets of Skopje? Being part of the solution to assist the Roma helps us deal with the everyday encounters of poverty while supporting a valuable cause.

The Association of Citizens Sumnal (AKA ‘Sumnal’) is a wonderful place to volunteer your talents. Sumnal is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting students, from preschool to age 18, and their families in their drive to improve their lives and living standards through education. Students who regularly attend Sumnal experience an average grade point increase of 40%. When Sumnal opened its educational center, there were zero youth from Topaana enrolled in high school. Today, only a few years later, there are over 70.

Sumnal is looking for a myriad of talents, from helping preschool teachers to serving meals to chatting with high school English learners. Whatever your talent or interest, there is a spot with your name on it. If you want to make a difference in a child’s life, please contact Stephanie Rowlands at sunsetcliffs@hotmail.com, and Jessica Mangskau, the US Peace Corps volunteer, at jmangskau@yahoo.com or check out their website (<http://sumnal.org/>) for more information.

SEASON'S GREETINGS

As the Holiday Season is approaching, the American Embassy would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your family a beautiful holiday and a New Year of peace and happiness.



This newsletter is an unofficial and informal source of practical information for American citizens residing in Macedonia. If you have comments, questions, or suggestions, please contact the Consular Section at (02) 310-2000, or at consularskopje@state.gov. This newsletter is also available on the American Citizens Services page of our website at <http://macedonia.usembassy.gov>